

DIPHTHERIA, TETANUS, AND PERTUSSIS

VACCINES

W H A T Y O U N E E D T O K N O W

1 Why get vaccinated?

Diphtheria, pertussis, and tetanus are serious diseases.

Diphtheria

- Diphtheria causes a thick covering in the back of the throat.
- It can lead to breathing problems, paralysis, heart failure, and even death

Tetanus (Lockjaw)

- Tetanus causes painful tightening of the muscles, usually all over the body.
- It can lead to "locking" of the jaw so the person cannot open his mouth or swallow. Tetanus can lead to death.

Pertussis (Whooping cough)

- Pertussis causes coughing spells so bad that it is hard for infants to eat, drink, or breathe. These can last for weeks.
- It can lead to pneumonia, seizures (jerking and staring spells), brain damage, and death.

Diphtheria, tetanus, and pertussis vaccines prevent these diseases. Most children who get all their shots will be protected during childhood. Many more children would get these diseases if we stopped vaccinating.

2 Diphtheria, tetanus, and pertussis vaccines

DTP vaccine

- Protects against diphtheria, tetanus, and pertussis
- Used for many years

DTaP vaccine

- Protects against diphtheria, tetanus, and pertussis
- Newer than DTP

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommends DTaP over DTP. This is because DTaP is less likely to cause reactions than DTP.

Related vaccines

- Combinations: To reduce the number of shots a child must get, DTP or DTaP may be available in combination with other vaccines.
- DT protects against diphtheria and tetanus, but *not* pertussis. It only is recommended for children who should not get pertussis vaccine.



3

What are the risks from these vaccines?

- As with any medicine, vaccines carry a small risk of serious harm, such as a severe allergic reaction or even death.
- If there are reactions, they usually start within 3 days and don't last long.
- Most people have no serious reactions from these vaccines.

Possible reactions to these vaccines:

Mild Reactions (common)

- Sore arm or leg
- Fussy
- Tired
- Fever
- Less appetite
- Vomiting

Mild reactions are much less likely after DTaP than after DTP.

Moderate to Serious Reactions (uncommon)

Moderate to serious reactions have been uncommon with DTP vaccine:

- Non-stop crying (3 hours or more) 100 of every 10,000 doses
- Fever of 105 or higher 30 of every 10,000 doses
- Seizure (jerking or staring) 6 of every 10,000 doses
- Child becomes limp, pale, less alert 6 of every 10,000 doses

With DTaP vaccine, these reactions are much less likely to happen.

Severe Reactions (very rare)

There are two kinds of serious reactions:

- Severe allergic reaction (breathing difficulty, shock)
- Severe brain reaction (long seizure, coma or lowered consciousness)

Is there lasting damage?

- Experts disagree on whether pertussis vaccines cause lasting brain damage.
- If they do, it is very rare.

Most experts believe serious reactions will be *more rare* after DTaP than after DTP.